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CAXTON'S NARRATIVE READERS

OLD TIME TALES OF INDIA

510

By

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THE DESCENT OF THE GUNGA

Every pious Hindu knows that there are seven sacred rivers in India—the Gunga (Ganges), the Jamuna, the Saraswati, the Godaveri, the Narmada, the Sindhu (Indus), and the Kauvery. Of them all the Gunga is the most sacred. To die on its banks in their old age is the cherished hope of almost all Hindus. Its water is believed to wash away sin, and is drunk reverentially in every Hindu home. Hindus living at a distance from the Ganges procure its water, store it, and drink it when required.

According to legend, the Gunga was a heavenly river brought down to earth in the following manner.

The Surya Bansha (Solar dynasty) of India is the oldest kshatriya dynasty in the land. It has produced famous warriors, renowned kings and statesmen. Ramchandra, who is recognised as an incarnation of God, was born in this race.

Bibaswan, which means Surya (Sun), was the first king of this dynasty, from whom it came to be known by this name. It is said

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he used to live on the top of the sacred Sumeru. His son was named Baibaswata Manu, who descended from that sacred hill and established a colony in Aryabarta. Manu's son, Ikshaku, established Ayodhya on the banks of the Sarayu in Kosala Raj and was its first ruler.

King Sagara was born in this dynasty. He was very pious, and frequently performed yagnas. He once performed the Aswamedha Yagna on a lavish scale. In due course, the sacrificial horse was released; as it wandered on, no one dared to obstruct its progress.

Indra, the King of the Gods, became alarmed at the yagnas that Sagara had performed. He feared that through the power thus acquired by Sagara he would be dispossessed some day. He therefore stole Sagara's sacrificial horse and kept it hidden in Patala (the nether regions), where the sage Kapila passed his days in contemplation.

Days passed, and as the horse did not return, Sagara became uneasy and began making enquiries.

Sagara had sixty thousand sons. With their father's permission, they started in

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search of the horse. After a long search, they came to Patala and found their horse in the hermitage of Kapila. Supposing that Kapila had defied their father and stolen the horse, they asked him roughly, "You wicked man, how did you dare steal our horse?"

The sage looked at them calmly and asked, "Who are you, my sons?"

"What?" they roared, "don't you know us? We are the sons of King Sagara, the ruler of the world."

"Oh! What brings you here, children?"

"Don't pretend to be ignorant, you thief."

"What has upset you?"

"You are a thief. You will be punished immediately."

"Don't be abusive. Tell me what has happened."

"You had the effrontery to steal our horse—not an ordinary creature, but a sacrificial horse."

"I do not know how your horse came to be here. You can take it away, if you like."

"Certainly we will. But we shall punish you for your rascality," and they began ill-using him.

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The sage kept his temper for a while; but when the boys went beyond bounds he emitted fire from his body, with the result that they were reduced to ashes in a moment.

The men who accompanied Sagara's sons brought word of the terrible event to their lord. There was consternation in the royal household. A gloom fell over the land, and everybody feared that Ayodhya might be destroyed, if the sage Kapila should come to demand an explanation from Sagara.

Ansuman, the son of one of Sagara's queens, begged his father to permit him to visit the sage Kapila and cool his wrath. After some hesitation, the king allowed him to go.

Ansuman reached the hermitage of Kapila and, by his supplications, was able to appease the wrath of the sage. Seizing a favourable opportunity, Ansuman prayed, "Oh! Sage, now that you are pleased with me, tell me how my brothers may be saved."

Kapila replied, "There is only one way. If you can bring down the sacred Gunga from heaven and with her water wash your brothers' ashes, they will be saved."

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"A most difficult task," mused Ansuman. He asked the sage presently, "Is there no other means of saving them?"

"No, I have spoken."

Ansuman saluted him respectfully and returned home to tell Sagara his story. Sagara tried to bring down Gunga, but failed. Ansuman also tried to do so, but without avail. His son, Dilip, who was a most famous warrior, in his turn made an effort to bring her down, but to no purpose.

Dilip had a son named Bhagiratha, who was very virtuous and learned. When he learnt of the fate of Sagara's sons, he resolved to save them. One day he left home, went to Gokarna, and began to practise austerities. He kindled a fire around him and, sitting inside, performed his austerity with uplifted hands. Years passed, but he still remained in his place without even moving.

His austerities pleased the gods, who, with Bramha at their head, came to see him one day. Bramha blessed him and addressed him thus: "My son, I am pleased with you. Ask for a boon."

Bhagiratha saluted him very respectfully

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and, with folded hands, said, "Father, if you are pleased with me, pray tell me how I can bring down Gunga from heaven."

"Do you see this goddess?" Bramha asked, pointing to one of his companions.

"Yes, father."

"This goddess is no other than Gunga. She is the eldest daughter of Himalaya. She will descend from heaven. But there is one difficulty. In her leap, I fear the earth may not remain stable. So steps will have to be taken to prevent any harm to the earth."

"What should I do, father?"

"There is only one God who will be able to sustain the force of her leap without feeling any trouble. He is no other than Siva himself. So go to Siva and beg him to help you in your difficulty."

Bhagiratha stood on his toes and began to pray to Siva. A year passed and then Siva was moved by his prayers and agreed to help him.

Gunga thought that she would play a trick on Siva. She decided to come down with such force that Siva himself would be carried away to the nether regions. She forgot that

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Siva was all-knowing. So when she descended with terrific force on the matted hair of Siva, she saw, to her dismay, that she herself was lost there and could not escape.

Days passed, but she had to wander about Siva's hair. Bhagiratha too was dismayed. He began praying to Siva once more. Siva was pleased with him and released Gunga, who leaped out from his hair in seven streams.

What a rush of water there was! Now leaping, now dancing, now rushing, on sped Gunga Patalawards. Bhagiratha led one of the streams, blowing a conch-shell now and then. It was a sight worth seeing; and the gods, rishis, and other holy men gathered in their thousands to witness the wonder.

It so happened that the sage Janhu had his hermitage on the path that Gunga had taken. He was performing a yagna, when the water rushed on him and carried off his yagnic things. At this he lost his temper and swallowed the water—another wonderful sight which amazed the gods, still looking on.

Bhagiratha fell at the feet of the sage and prayed to him to release Gunga. The gods

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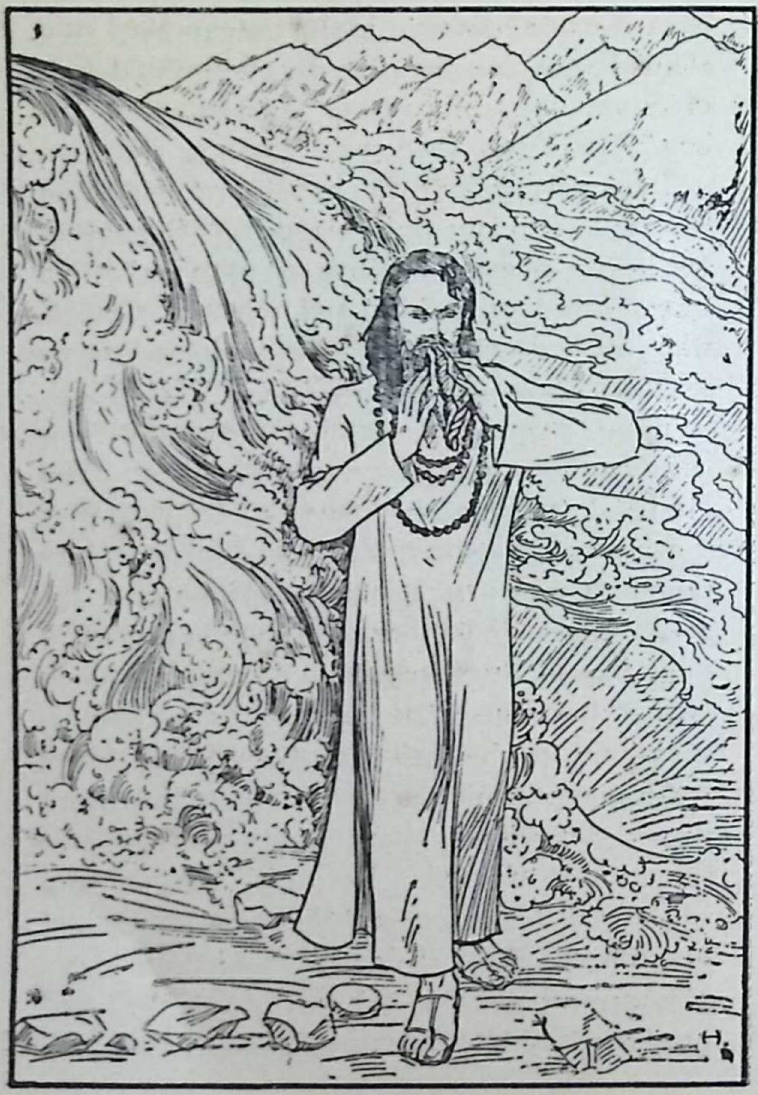

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joined in his prayer. Janhu was pleased and released her through his ear. From that day, Gunga acquired a new name, Janhavi or the daughter of Janhu.

Thus released, Gunga sped on, Bhagiratha leading. By and by she came to the place where the ashes of Sagara's sons lay in a heap, and washed them away. Presently they all revived and, assuming the bodies of gods, ascended to heaven.

Thus was Bhagiratha's desire gratified. He was about to leave the place when Bramha appeared and said, "My son your devotion has gratified us all. Henceforth Gunga will be unto you as a daughter. She will have another name, Bhagirath, and thus your name will be preserved in the world for ever."

Bhagiratha saluted him respectfully and went home rejoicing.

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HONOUR THY FATHER

Jit Bahadur was very poor. He lived in a village on the outskirts of Khatmaro (Katamundu, the capital of Nepal.) His mud hut had not been repaired for years and was in danger of falling down. It leaked badly whenever it rained, and was almost uninhabitable. But what could Jit do? He had no other place where he could find shelter. His relatives would not help him in any way. Some of them even disowned relationship with him.

Jit had an old invalid father to support. He was a cobbler's assistant and his earnings were so small that he could hardly secure one meal a day. His hours of work were long and, for the slightest mistake, his employer would abuse and beat him.

Jit knew no other trade, so he could not seek other work. Once he thought of going to the city, where better wages could be had; but what would become of his father then? He could not afford to take him to the city with him. So he decided to stay in his village and abide by his fate.

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He would get up very early and cook meals for two. He would feed his father with his own hands, wash his clothes, prepare his bed, and do all that was necessary to make him comfortable. He would return home immediately his work was done and wait on his father, and would not retire until the old man had gone to sleep.

Thus the days and the weeks wore on. Jit's love for his father became widely known, and sometimes a well-to-do neighbour would send him presents, which Jit appreciated very much.

One day, his father fell seriously ill. Jit had no money to pay for medical attendance, and he wondered what he could do. He had no property which he might pledge and thus secure a loan. The village money lender would not advance anything without security. Utterly discouraged he sat down on the door-step and began to cry.

A plainly dressed young man of handsome appearance happened to pass by his door at the time. He stopped, looked at Jit keenly, and said gently, "My friend, you seem to be in distress. What troubles you?" Jit

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looked up at him and was fascinated. There was something in his face that charmed him. He saluted him respectfully and observed with folded hands, "Sir, I am very poor. I have a sick father and do not know how I can—"

"I see," interrupted the stranger. "Are you Jit Bahadur?"

Jit looked at him in surprise and questioned, "Who told you my name, sir?"

The stranger smiled and replied, "Your fame has spread in the land. Your love for your father is a byword in this district."

Jit blushed and hung his head.

"Well," the stranger went on, "you are no ordinary person. You deserve a better fate. I have heard about you and shall do what I can for you."

Jit looked at him gratefully.

"How many rooms are there in your hut?"

"Only, two sir."

"I see," the stranger mused. "Do you know of any house that is to let?"

"No, sir, there is none in this village."

"Oh! Very good. Have you any objection to—to—well, suppose, I remove your father to

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the city and have him treated there at my expense. What do you say?"

"But he has none except my humble self to look after him. If he be taken to the city, I shall have to accompany him. This will mean absence from my duties. My employer will dismiss me. What will become of me, then?"

"Do not let that trouble you, my friend. I have thought of all these things. Your employer pays you very little. I undertake to secure a better paid job for you in the city, and you will have men to attend on your father."

"No, no, I cannot allow others to serve my father. They do not know his wants. They will not be able to give him satisfaction. Years of suffering have made him peevish. He abuses even me if I fail to carry out his slightest order."

"Do not worry over that, my friend. You may certainly wait on your father yourself. But, if you wish, I shall engage men to help you."

Jit looked at the stranger keenly for a moment and asked, "Pardon my curiosity,

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sir. I cannot make out why you, evidently a rich man, are taking so much interest in me, a poor friendless downtrodden outcaste. May I ask you—?"

The stranger laughed and said, "Rich men have their whims. I have my whim."

"Oh! I see. Do as you think proper, master. I am your slave."

"I dislike honied words. You are unto me as a brother from to-day. I have taken a liking to you and am ready to help you all I can. I shall come to-morrow morning and take you both to my home in the city. See that you are ready," and saluting Jit, he walked away, leaving him in astonishment.

True to his promise, the stranger returned the next day with two carts. Two men accompanied him. They placed Jit's father in a cart and drove to the city.

On the way, the stranger did not exchange more than a few words with Jit. They reached his home, which was a small house, plainly furnished. His new friend, whose name was Bun Bir, welcomed Jit and his father to his home. Jit saw that every arrangement for the proper care and treatment

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of his father had already been made, for a medical man was already in attendance. The doctor examined Jit's father and explained that though his case was serious there was no cause for alarm. He continued to come twice, sometimes thrice, a day and took every care of his patient.

Jit was not allowed to sit idle. Bun Bir secured him a job as a cobbler's assistant on good pay. His new employer was a very good man who had a large and flourishing business. Under him, Jit learnt many new things which his old employer had not known. Jit did his best to please his employer, who was so well satisfied with his work that, within six months, he had doubled his pay and put him in charge of one of his shops.

A year passed. Jit's father soon recovered and was able to walk about freely. Jit had been able to save some money from his pay, which he handed over to his friend for safe investment.

Another year passed. Then one day in the course of conversation, Bun Bir said to Jit, "My friend, I shall now bid you goodbye and go my way. I owe you much. Your debt

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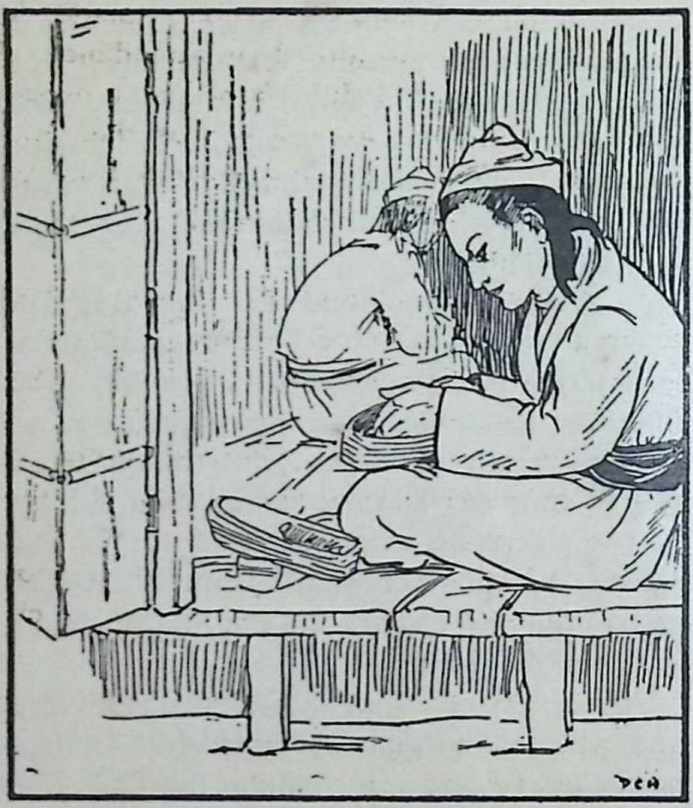

I shall never be able to repay. I shall ever pray for your welfare."

Jit looked at him in surprise and questioned, "What do you mean, my friend? You in my debt? Never! Rather it is you that have given me everything I have. I cannot make

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out your meaning."

Bun Bir was quiet for a moment, and then said thoughtfully, "You never cared to enquire who I was. I did not think it advisable to disclose my identity until now. But the time has come when you should know who I am. Listen. Have you noticed that I do not mix with anybody here?"

"No; but now that you mention it, I think there is something mysterious about your movements. I am not inquisitive by nature and so I never asked you."

"Exactly so; you are a man out of the ordinary. That is why I chose to befriend you. The time has come when you should know who I am. But keep my confession a secret. Now hear me patiently."

"I was an attendant in the court of Indra, the King of the gods. I happened to offend my master one day. For my offence, he banished me from court. He told me that I must go to earth and help a poor man who had extraordinary qualities. If, as a result of my services, I could better his lot, I would be pardoned and taken back into favour. I roamed over the land for a long time, and,

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at last, found that you were just the man to whom my master had referred. Honouring parents is a rare virtue in these days. You have not looked to your own comforts at any time; but your father has been your first consideration. You have served him whole-heartedly and without complaint. You deserved a reward and I have done what I can for your good. Your success has not turned your head, and your affection for your father has not cooled in the least degree. I have tested you in many ways and am fully satisfied. I have heard from another attendant in my master's court who saw me other day, that my offence has been pardoned and that if I wish I may return to my place. I shall bid you good-bye for ever. But before I leave, I should like to tell you that the house in which you are now living is your own. I have purchased it in your name. Your present employer will shortly admit you as a partner, and, as he has a flourishing business, you will make large profits from now on. You will make a very happy marriage shortly. I have nothing more to add, except my blessing. May you ever be happy!"

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Jit drank in his friend's words with wonder. He began to shed tears of joy, and when Bun Bir finished, he fell at his feet in gratitude. When Jit looked up again he saw that his friend had disappeared; but on the place where he had stood, there lay a rose. Jit took it up tenderly and placed it in his puja room.

As Bun Bir had foretold, all his prophecies came true and Jit became the happiest man in the city. But he did not forget his duty towards his father, although he was now rich and had servants to wait on him.

He missed his friend very much; but he consoled himself with the thought that he was watching over him and would ever stand by him. He had an image of his friend made, which he placed in a room, and at its feet he laid flowers every day and offered a prayer.

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THE BANDIT WHO BECAME A POET

My readers have, no doubt, heard of the Ramayana, one of the greatest epics of India. They, or at least some of them, are not, perhaps, aware that, according to tradition, it was composed hundreds of years before the birth of its hero, Ramchandra, who is recognised as an incarnation of God all over Hindustan. The name of its composer was Valmiki, who in his early life was a bandit. How he became good and won everlasting fame is the subject of this story.

Valmiki's name was Ratnakar. He was a Brahman by birth. From his early youth, he neglected his studies. If his parents remonstrated with him, he would get cross and even abuse them. They had become old and infirm, and though they tried their best to reform him, they failed. In despair, they allowed him to have his way. The result was that he soon acquired all sorts of vices, and gradually became a terror in the land.

When he grew up, he took to the life of a freebooter. With a thick stick in his hand, he would roam about, and no passerby was

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safe. He did not distinguish between an ascetic and a house-holder. Anybody who carried a load of any kind was deprived of it. He did not hesitate to kill or maim persons who offered resistance. Gradually, the place became deserted; for those who heard about his depredations avoided it as far as possible.

With the proceeds of his loot, Ratnakar used to support his family. The latter knew he was wicked, but did not know how he earned his living. They were afraid to ask him.

One day, as he stood on a road waiting for a victim, he saw two sadhus, approaching him. When they came near, he addressed them roughly, "Who are you? Where are you going? Stop and deliver."

One of them looked at him with a smile and replied, "Don't you see that we are ascetics, my child? But who are you yourself?"

"That's none of your business. Let me have everything you possess."

"You seem to be a Brahman, though you are behaving like a low class fellow. We see a stick in your hand. Your eyes are bloodshot

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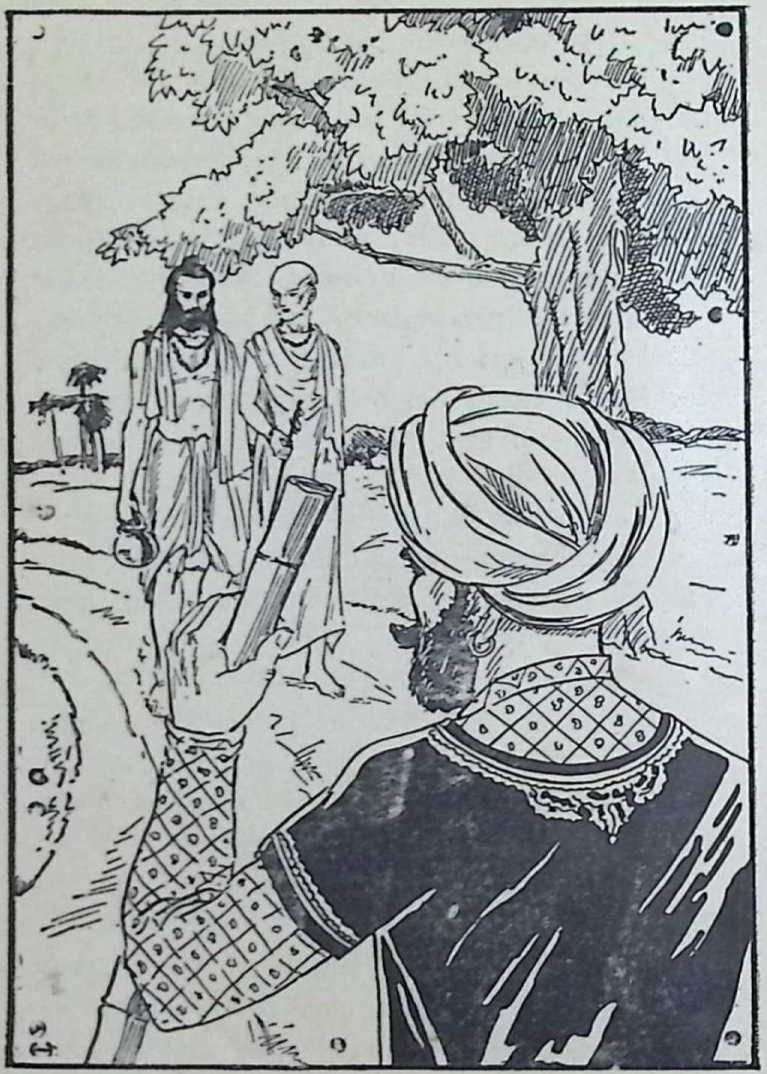

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and you are very much excited. Your behaviour is very unlike that of a Brahman."

"I have no time to bandy words with you. Will you give up your money or not?"

"Do not lose your temper, child. Why don't you answer me? Who are you, really?"

"I am a Brahman."

"That we have guessed. But why do you behave thus?"

"To support my family," Ratnakar answered gruffly.

"Why, you can get all you require very easily here."

"How?"

"You can become the court pandit of the king of your country."

"But I have had no education."

"Who is to blame for that?"

"I myself."

"I thought as much. Why don't you turn over a new leaf?"

"I have gone too far and it is too late to recede."

"How many persons depend on your earnings?"

"My father, mother, wife, and son."

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"Ah! You have a large number of mouths to feed, then. You have chosen a wrong calling, my son."

"I have no time to listen to your lecture. Will you hand over your goods, or shall I take them from you?"

"Don't be in a hurry, child. You will have everything in our possession. But I have one or two further questions to put."

"Hurry up."

"You have to walk up and down this place all day long. We do not think you earn much. You are piling up your sins. If you wish, you can easily support yourself and your family by plucking various kinds of fruits which abound in this place. There are edible roots to be had for nothing. If you go out to beg, people will gladly give you a dole because you are a Brahman. So, my child, give up your present calling, which is immoral, and which besides might result in your death, should you happen to meet a person more powerful than yourself."

"That is true, but I have gone too far to recede."

"No, no, there is hope for you yet. There

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is another thing. You are piling up your sins. Have you asked your father, mother, wife, and son whether they are prepared to share in your sins?"

"Why should they not? Don't they know how they are being supported?"

"Have you ever put this question to any of them?"

"No."

"Then go and enquire."

"Ah! You are very clever, I see. Your idea is to send me away on an excuse and run away. I am no fool."

"Well, if you do not believe me tie us to a tree close by. Then go home and put the question I asked to every member of your family and let me have their answer. Go, my son."

Ratnakar was much impressed by the sadhu's words. He tied the two sadhus to a tree and went home. There he said to his father, "I wish to ask you a question. You are no doubt aware how I support you. I sin for you everyday. Are you prepared to share in my sins?"

His father replied, "I have brought you up.

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I tried my best to give you proper education, but you neglected your studies and took to a wild life in spite of my protests. I am now old and infirm. It is the duty of a son to support his father and mother in their old age. I do not care to know how you earn a living. I did not advise you to turn bandit. So why should I share in your sin? A father does not suffer for the sins of his son nor a son for the sins of his father."

Ratnakar put a similar question to his mother and got the same answer. He next questioned his wife, who said, "You promised to support me before Agni, the God of Fire, when you married me. It is your duty to support me by any means, fair or foul. If you sin, why should I share in your sins?"

He then questioned his son, who also told him to his face that he would not share in his sins.

At this Ratnakar became very much depressed. He began to repent of his mistakes and to feel humiliated and crushed. He walked to the place where he had tied the two sadhus, released them, and fell at their feet, crying.

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Now the two sadhus were no other than Bramha, the Creator, and Narada, the great sage, in disguise. They lifted Ratnakar gently and said, "Son, now that you have seen the error of your ways and are repentant, you will yet be saved."

"How, Oh! Fathers, how?" And Ratnakar seized their feet and looked at them appealingly.

"Begin to-day to repeat the name Ram. Repeat it a million times. Then your sins will be washed away and you will be another man." The sadhus placed their hands on his head and blessed him.

Ratnakar rose with a light heart. He felt as if a load had been taken off his shoulders. He saluted the sadhus most respectfully, and sat down to pray, as advised by them. He did not return home. The days, weeks and months rolled away, but Ratnakar did not stir from his seat. He was living a new life.

After many years, Bramha and Narada came to the place to see what Ratnakar was doing. Very much pleased at the change he had undergone, they praised him. On leaving him they said, "Son, we find that while you

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were engaged in meditation, an ant-hill grew around you. You were not aware of the fact, so intent were you on your meditation! From this time you will be known as Valmiki."

Valmiki saluted them and received their blessings. Through their favour, he became a master of various sastras. His fame spread far and wide and many a person came to his hermitage to study. His wants were all met by his neighbours and friends. The ex-bandit was now one of the greatest of men. His disciples numbered hundreds, many of whom became distinguished.

One day, Narada narrated to him the story of Ramchandra. This impressed him very much and he reflected on it constantly.

One evening, Bramha came to see him and advised him to narrate in verse the story of Ramchandra as he had heard it from Narada, adding, "By my blessing, you will come to know many facts relating to Rama and Sita, which you do not now know. I declare that so long as this earth remains, your composition will be remembered. It will be carried from life to life and recited with every mark of reverence. I bless you,"

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and Bramha laid his hand on his head.

It will interest my readers to know that there was no book of verse before the composition of the Ramayana by Valmiki. So he is known as the 'Adi Kavi,' or the first poet of Hindustan. True it is, the Hymns of the Vedas were composed long before the Ramayana was written. But, according to the sastras, these were not written by human means. So the Ramayana is the earliest metrical composition of man in India.

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THE LUCK OF SRINIVASH

When Sundaram, who lived at Kunchi, felt that he had not many more days to live, he sent for his two sons, Jogiah and Srinivash, and said, "My boys, I do not think I shall live long. I was once well off but I have lost the money I made. Even this house is no longer mine. I have no cash, I do not own an inch of land, and what is more, I am in debt. It is your duty to pay my debt. Here is a list of my creditors. I have done my best for you, but am sorry to say that you have not made the best of your opportunities. I cannot undo what is past. All that I can do is to give you good advice. Be good, kind, just and loving and all will be well with you. See that your poor mother does not suffer in any way. Try to make her as comfortable as you can and see that her last days are not embittered by poverty. I have nothing more to add. You have my blessings. Go to your work. Siva! Siva!!"

A few days later, Sundaram died. His house, which he had already sold to pay his debts, was taken possession of by the

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purchaser. The brothers and their mother on being turned out, rented a hut in the outskirts of their town.

After performing their father's *sradh*, the brothers found that their debt amounted to several thousand rupees. Jogia, the elder brother, managed to secure work, but Srinivash failed to find any thing to do. He did not know any art or trade, and could not even write well.

Jogia was mean and avaricious. He was untruthful, and treated with harshness everybody who crossed his path. Some months after he said to Srinivash, "Look here, you are strong and healthy, but will not work. I am not going to feed a ne'er-do-well like you for the rest of his life. You will have to earn your living by your own efforts. I order you to leave my house within twenty-four hours. Do you hear?"

Srinivash answered, "Brother, your wishes will be obeyed. But you know I have been trying my best to find work, though so far without success. I have nobody in the world except yourself to support me in my unhappy position. I cannot secure a job within

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twenty-four hours. Pray don't be cruel. Give me a little more time and I am sure I shall be able to find something to do."

"No, no, I give you only twenty-four hours. Understand?"

Srinivash told his mother what his elder brother had required of him. She remonstrated with Jogia but without avail. The latter even told her to shift for herself, as he did not care to feed an idle woman any longer. So it happened that, next day, Jogia turned Srinivash out. His mother, fearing further humiliation, left with Srinivash. Towards evening, they reached a forest and decided to pass the night under a tree. About midnight, Srinivash, who was keeping watch over his mother, heard a conversation between two birds in the tree above him. One bird said, "The young man is unfortunate. He has nobody in the world to care for him. Besides, he has an aged mother to feed. I feel sorry for him."

The other bird asked, "Can't you help him in his trouble?"

"I am only a bird, so what can I do? But I can at least tell him how to improve his lot."

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"Why don't you do so then?"

"About half a *cos* to the east of this forest there is a stone image, known as Pathandeo. This God fulfils the desires of those who are good, kind and loving, but does not help the wicked. If the young man will offer puja to the God, his desire will be granted."

"I hope he has overheard our conversation, and will try to profit by your advice."

Srinivash had indeed been listening intently to the conversation of the birds, and resolved to offer puja to Pathandeo in the morning.

He got up early, gathered some flowers, and walked to the place indicated. After some search, he found the image hidden behind some bushes. It was shaped like a tiger, but without paws.

Srinivash placed the flowers before the God and with folded hands he begged, "O thou! Giver of gifts, show thy pleasure to me, a poor man. I do not know how to move thy heart, or secure thy favour. I have nothing to offer thee except these flowers, which deign to accept."

Suddenly Srinivash heard a voice asking, "Whence do you come?"

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He gave the information.

"What do you want ?"

"Pray, give me wealth."

"Tell me your story in detail."

Srinivash did so.

"I see you are not only truthful, but loving and kind. You will have my favour." Srinivash bowed low.

"Now do one thing. Give my back a blow. Then I will open my mouth and pour out gold for you. Take it and make the best use of it."

Srinivash did as he had been told and was amazed to find a stream of gold coins pouring from the tiger's mouth. Within a minute, the God poured out enough gold coins to keep Srinivash and his mother in affluence for the rest of their lives.

Srinivash gathered up the coins and returned to the tree where his mother sat in anxious expectancy. She soon learnt his story and was overjoyed. She looked up and thanked the birds which had been instrumental in changing their fortune. Srinivash and his mother then walked to Kunchi, where they found a house.

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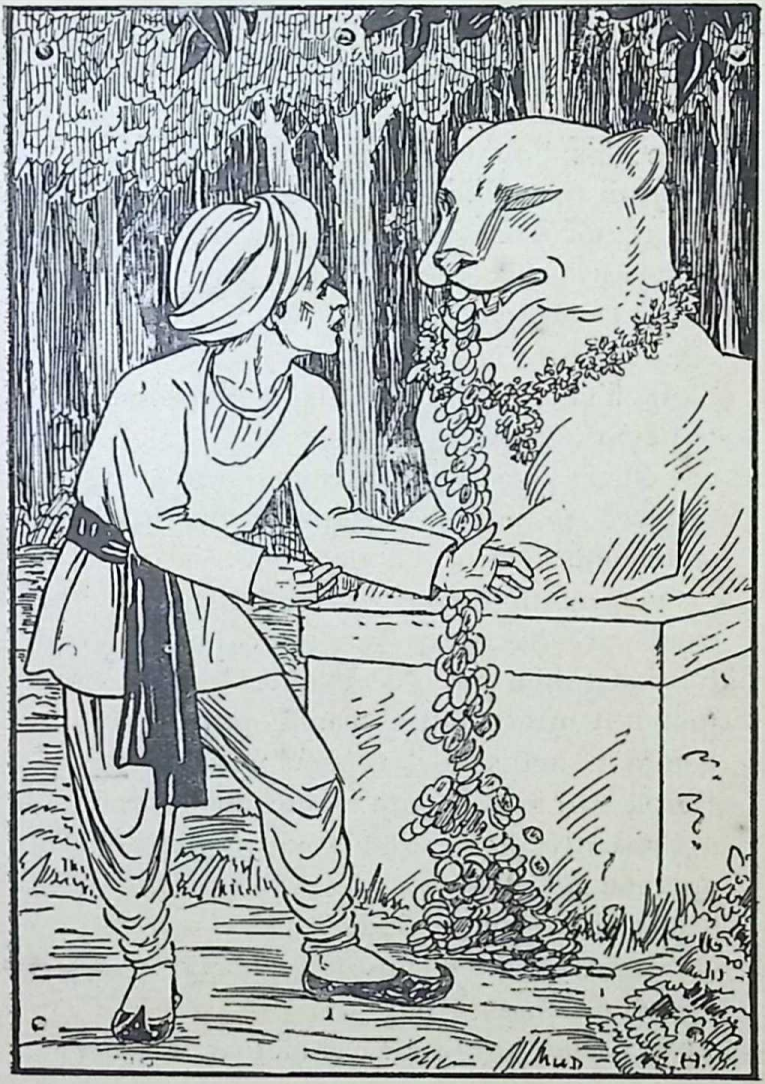

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Srinivash went to see Jogia, whom he told of his good fortune. He invited him to come and live with him. But Jogia could not bear to see his brother's happiness. He roundly charged him with robbery and said that he would not live with a brother who was undoubtedly a dacoit; for it was absurd to think that a stone image could talk and could pour out wealth.

At first, therefore, Jogia was inclined to treat Srinivash's story as a fairy tale; but presently curiosity overcame him and he resolved to test the truth of his brother's statement.

One morning, he took some flowers and went to the place where Srinivash had informed him the 'Pathandeo' stood. He found it after a little search, placed flowers before it, and said, "O thou powerful deity! Be pleased to look with favour upon me."

Presently, he heard a voice asking, "Who art thou?"

"A poor man, O God!"

"Have you no means of livelihood?"

"None whatsoever."

"Have you any brother, or mother, or father?"

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"None."

"Do you know one Srinivash of Kunchi?"

"No, O God!"

"Hum!"

Presently, the God roared, and all of a sudden a real tiger appeared on the scene. The God said to the tiger, "Here is a mean, avaricious, undutiful man. Teach him a lesson."

The tiger at once pounced upon him and was about to devour him when Srinivash suddenly appeared on the scene.

Though Jogia had treated him so badly, Srinivash had still wished to help him. Accordingly he had gone to his house, and heard that his brother had left for the forest. He at once concluded that his brother's object was to seek a boon at the hands of the 'Pathandeo.' But knowing his brother's character well, he feared some harm might befall him. So he ran to the place where the God stood. He appeared just in time. When he saw what was about to happen to his brother, he fell at the deity's feet and prayed, "O kind God! Be pleased to pardon my brother's fault. He is foolish, and does

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not know right from wrong," and he bowed to it repeatedly.

The God said, "You are pleading for one who does not wish you well. He will do you harm when he finds an opportunity. You know his character well and yet you are pleading for him. That is strange!"

"O God!" Srinivash pleaded with folded hands, "My brother may be what you say; still he is my brother. He is under some influence which has led him in evil ways. But by your favour he will become another man. Pray release him for my sake."

"Will your brother promise to turn over a new leaf and treat you and your mother well?"

Srinivash turned to Jogia and asked him to reply to the God.

Jogia felt thoroughly humiliated. He saw the error of his ways and was repentant. He fell at his brother's feet and begged to be forgiven.

Srinivash raised him up gently and said, "What are you doing? You, my elder brother, falling at my feet? Ah! You have made me commit a sin. I must expiate it. Tell the God what you have to say. I never bore you

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any ill-will. You are my elder brother—you are in the position of a father, according to our sastras. So I have no right to complain against you. I have nothing to forgive, for you have not done me any harm."

"Do you hear, Jogia," the God cried, "What your brother says? As he has forgiven you, I forgive you for his sake. But rest assured that; should you ever do him any harm, I shall know of it and visit my wrath on you. So do your duty. I have spoken. Hum!"

The tiger disappeared immediately. Then the two brothers saluted the God respectfully and returned home.

Needless to say, Jogia was thoroughly changed, and a more loving brother and son Kunchi could not boast.

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THE BIRTH OF THE TULASI

Every orthodox Hindu, specially one belonging to the Vaishnava sect, makes a point of rearing a Tulasi plant in his house. It is regularly watered, and every evening a light is waved before it by a female member of his family, who salutes it reverentially. The leaf is used on every sacred occasion—be it a *puja* a marriage or a *sradh*.

From the lay point of view, the leaf has medicinal value. In certain infantile diseases, it is used by house-wives. At least one homeopathic medicine has been manufactured from the Tulasi and is used, in certain diseases, by modern homeopathic practitioners.

This is the legend of the Tulasi. Indra the God of gods, once went to the abode of Siva to pay his respects. He did not find Siva there, but a fierce-looking person instead. He had never seen him before and could not imagine who he was.

He asked him, " Can you tell me where Mahadeo is ? "

He got no reply. He repeated his question, but to no purpose. At this he lost

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his temper and hurled his thunderbolt at the man. Immediately fire came out of the forehead of the strange God and was about to burn Indra, when the latter discovered that the God was no other than Siva himself.

Indra immediately began to pray to him. Siva's anger was appeased and Indra was excused for his impertinence.

The fire which had come out of Siva's forehead was still alight. What was to be done with it? After some thinking, it was decided to hurl the fire into the ocean.

When this was done, a wonderful thing happened. From the fire, a child was born. The ocean knew not what to do with him. So it went to Bramha, the Creator and said, "Father, I am in a quandary. I do not know what to do with this child. Please take care of it."

The child's beauty pleased Bramha, who took him in his lap and began to caress him. He named him Jalandhur.

When Jalandhur grew up Bramha appointed him King of the Asuras and conferred on him a boon. This was that nobody would be able to do him any harm except Siva.

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Bramha never imagined that the child whom he had reared would become the terror of the three worlds later on.

There was a powerful giant, whose name was Kalnemi. He had a most beautiful daughter, named Brinda. In due course, Jalandhur was married to Brinda.

By and by, Jalandhur began to show his inborn ferocity. He drove out all the gods from heaven, including Indra himself, and took possession of that world. The gods offered resistance, but they were no match for Jalandhur. They went to Siva, who, they knew, was responsible for Jalandhur's existence, and told him their sufferings. Siva heard them attentively and bade them be of good cheer, promising to kill Jalandhur soon.

Siva sent for Jalandhur, but the later defied him. At this, Siva's wrath was roused and he challenged Jalandhur to a combat.

What a fierce battle it was! For days it raged, neither side winning a victory.

When Brinda heard with whom her husband was fighting, she felt that his days were numbered. She ran to Vishnu, the protector, and began to worship him with heart and soul.

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Vishnu was pleased and asked her what she wanted. She begged that in the fight in which her husband was engaged, he might come out successful. Her prayer was granted and the Destroyer was thus prevented from killing the child of his own creation.

At this the gods were frightened and ran to Vishnu, saying, "Father, what have you done? Jalandhur has now conquered the three worlds and is a menace to creation. His death is absolutely necessary for the preservation of creation. So be pleased to withdraw your protection without delay."

Vishnu understood the situation and took steps to undo the effect of his boon. He withdrew his protection from Jalandhur, who, however, was so obsessed with his powers that he challenged Siva to a fight again. Siva now prepared a terrible weapon with which to kill Jalandhur. When the latter came to attack him he said, "Jalandhur, here is a terrible weapon. If you can lift it, then I will fight with you; otherwise not."

"Pooh! Only one weapon? I can lift thousands like it." And he tried to lift it. He found that this was no easy matter. He possessed

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superhuman strength, however, and after much effort was able to lift the weapon and place it on his shoulder. But directly he did so, his body broke in two and fell into the sea.

When Brinda heard of her husband's death, she felt that Vishnu had tricked her. She became angry and running to him said, "You have played a trick on me. I shall not forgive you for this. I am about to pronounce a curse on you. A Sati's curse never fails."

In alarm, Vishnu said, "Don't be angry with me, my daughter. What I did was for the protection of creation. You yourself would have done what I did had you been in my position. But do not lose your temper. I confer on you a boon: from the ashes of your body will grow a plant which my worshippers will ever venerate. It will be known as the Tulasi plant. Go now and ascend your husband's funeral pyre. On your death you will be taken to heaven and become an immortal."

Brinda heaved a sigh, bowed to Vishnu and proceeded to carry out his instructions.

Thus the Tulasi plant came into being—a plant which millions in India venerate and worship everyday.

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THE WAY OF THE ENLIGHTENED ONE

Once the Buddha took his birth in the house of the King of Banarashi (Benares). In those days, the kingdom of Banarashi extended over a much wider area than now.

From his childhood, the Bodhisatwa was gentle, wise, and loving. If he saw anybody ill-treating an animal, he would rebuke him and tell him how he should behave towards all animals. If he found any wrong being done, he would take steps to correct it gently but firmly.

His father died when he was about sixteen years of age. Though so young, he assumed the reins of Government, and looked to everything himself.

He found that his capital city had no rest-house for pilgrims, so he built as many as half a dozen *sarais* in different parts of the city. He took steps to remove all bad characters from his city. He ruled benevolently and wisely. He listened to all complaints himself and remedied them to the best of his ability.

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His father had had a minister who was very wicked. When Buddha ascended the throne, this man thought that he would be able to influence him. But when he found that Buddha would not listen to his counsels, which were always bad, he resolved to take his revenge.

Buddha tried his best to make him turn over a new leaf, but failed. So he banished him from his kingdom.

In wrath, the minister went to the court of the King of Koshala (Ayodhya) and told him, "Sire, you can extend your territory with hardly any effort. Why not do so? I will help you."

"Who are you?"

"I was a Minister of the King of Banarashi."

"Why have you left him?"

"Because he is a bad man and will not listen to wise counsel."

"This is new to me. My information is that he is a very good man."

"Oh! But he is weak and listens to the counsels of his flatterers."

"How can I conquer his kingdom?"

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"By sending an army against him."

"How many soldiers should I send?"

"A thousand will do."

"What? A thousand? You must be mistaken."

"No, sire. Buddha will not offer any resistance. He will actually welcome the army."

"You surprise me! How should I proceed?"

"Send half a dozen men to stir up a revolt in Buddha's capital city first."

The Koshala Raja thought that the minister must be a spy; but without disclosing his suspicions, he told one of his ministers to send a dozen men to Banarashi to stir up a revolt amongst Buddha's subjects.

When these men reached the city and began creating trouble, Buddha heard of it and asked his Kotwal to bring the strangers to him.

When these men were brought, Buddha questioned them gently:

"Friends, what are you here for?"

"Sire," one of them replied, "We have heard of your good rule and have come to see how you carry on your Government."

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"Oh! but I hear you are trying to create mischief."

"Who told you that?"

"My men."

"The charge is untrue."

"Do you know where liars go?"

"No."

"To hell."

The men hung their heads in shame.

"Why don't you speak the truth?"

Still they maintained silence.

Buddha observed, "Your silence clearly proves that you are guilty. I advise you not to do anything which may pain others. Just put yourselves in their place."

The men were visibly affected, and one of them said, "Oh! King, I confess King Koshala has sent us to stir up a revolt in your kingdom. But we find that we are going to do harm to the wisest and kindest ruler in the land. We have seen the error of our ways. Punish us, sire, for we deserve punishment for our crime."

Buddha said, "Be of good cheer, my friends, convey my greetings to your King. Tell him if he wants my raj, he need only come and

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ask me to go away. I will cheerfully vacate the throne."

The men began to shed tears of joy. "Oh! good King" they said, "We are truly repentent. But we deserve punishment. Punish us as you wish." But Buddha loaded them with presents and sent them away with much good counsel.

When the King of Koshala heard his men's story, he was much surprised. He sent for the wicked minister and said, "I should not disturb a King like Buddha. He is so out of the ordinary run of men, that his court is in the forest, not in the city."

"That is the reason why it will be easy for you to extend your territory without any loss of life."

The King was avaricious. He could not resist the temptation to extend his kingdom with little effort. So he sent an army of five hundred men against Buddha. The latter marched out at the head of his army, welcomed the captain of the enemy's army, and so won him over by his gentleness and hospitality that the captain felt ashamed and departed for Koshala, without delay. Buddha

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did not allow him and his men to leave without loading them with valuable presents.

When the King of Koshala heard his captain's story, he resolved to go himself. At the head of an army of two thousand men, he appeared at Banarashi. Buddha had heard of his approach and, with his ministers, went to meet him.

"Friend," said Buddha, "Why are you taking so much trouble for nothing? If you want my raj, you are quite welcome to it."

His enemy was dumb-founded. For a few minutes he sat gazing at Buddha, who began to expound the philosophy of life.

The King of Koshala listened to him attentively. At first he was inclined to leave the place at once; but the wicked minister so poisoned his ears that he decided to take Buddha and his ministers prisoners. Neither Buddha nor his ministers offered any resistance whatsoever.

The King of Koshala ordered his men to take Buddha and his ministers to a forest and kill them there. But the men had already heard about Buddha and had not the heart to kill him. They carried him and his ministers

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to a forest, tied them to trees and came back and reported to their King that they had done away with their prisoners.

It so happened that an Asura lived in the forest. He chanced to come to the place where Buddha and his ministers were tied and asked them roughly, "Who are you? What are you doing here?" Buddha told him what had happened. "Oh! so you are Bodhisatwa," the Asura said softly. "I have heard about you from many persons. Though we Asuras are enemies of men, still we are not lost to a sense of duty. I live in your raj and am, therefore, your subject. I am bound to help you. Order me and I will make short work of the King of Koshala and his men."

"No, no," said Buddha. "Do not take their lives for nothing. The King of Koshala covets my land. I have given it to him of my own free will. So why should you proceed against him?"

The Asura was visibly affected. Tears rolled down his cheeks. He released Buddha and his ministers at once, brought them food, and made arrangements for their comfort.

Buddha asked him, "Can you take

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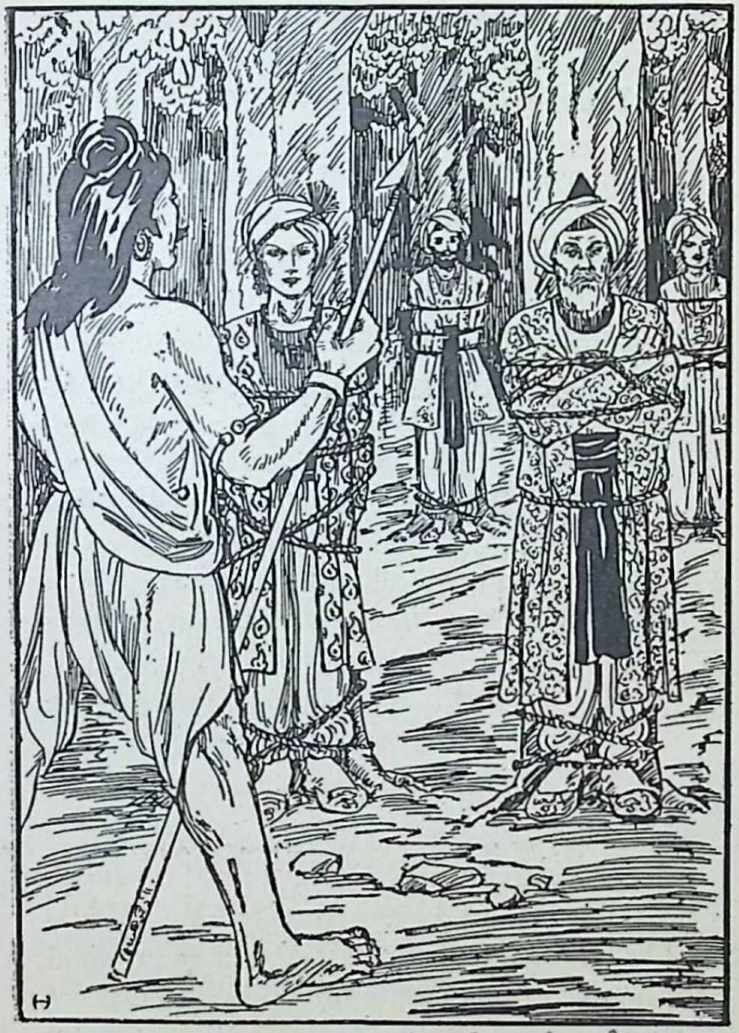

விவேகானந்தர் சங்கம்,
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me to King Koshala now?"

"What for?" asked the Asura.

"I wish to convert him to my religion if I can."

"Oh! very good," and the Asura transported him to the room in which the King of Koshala lay asleep. Buddha roused him gently. When the King saw him, he thought he was about to be killed. He looked about for his sword. But the Asura, anticipating matters, had already removed his sword and armour.

"Do not be alarmed, my friend," Buddha said gently. "I am not here to kill you, but to expound the tenets of my religion."

"How did you manage to enter my sleeping room in spite of the guards?"

"My friend here" (pointing to the Asura), "has brought me to your presence."

"Who is he?"

"Ask him."

"Who are you?" Koshala questioned the Asura.

"Your enemy," the latter replied gruffly.

"So I see; otherwise you would not have brought—"

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"Stop, my friend," Buddha interrupted. "I am here on a mission of peace. I want to preach my religion before your men. Will you listen to me? I bear you no ill-will. If I had any ulterior motive, I would have come armed. I would have resisted you when you entered my kingdom. See, I have nothing murderous with me."

The King was very much affected. He said, "I am now fully convinced that you are really kind, peace-loving, gentle, and wise. I have committed a sin by invading your territory. I will leave this place early to-morrow morning. You are not my prisoner, but I am yours. It is now for you to command and me to obey," and he rose and bowed to Buddha profoundly.

Then the Enlightened One began to expound the tenets of his religion, to which Koshala listened attentively.

Early next morning, Koshala struck his tents and started for home, after loading Buddha's ministers with valuable presents.

After reaching home, he had the wicked minister brought to his presence and addressed him thus: "You are a wicked man. I did wrong in listening to you. I was about to

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harm the kindliest, gentlest, and wisest of men; but through his influence I have seen the error of my ways. Men like you are a curse. I must not allow you to remain at large and commit further mischief." So saying, he ordered his Kotwal to strike off the wicked minister's head, an order that was immediately carried out.

INGRATITUDE

Once there lived a hunter who was very poor. As hunting was looked down upon by his fellow villagers, he was shunned by them. He did not mind their scorn, and if he was advised to earn a livelihood by some decent means he would say that hunting was a most noble profession. It did not cost anything to pursue, it secured food for him and he wanted nothing more.

One day as usual, he went out to hunt, but was unfortunate, as he got nothing. The heat was great and he felt tired, so he sat under a tree to rest, and fell fast asleep.

When he awoke, he saw that a shadow covered his body. He looked about him and found that a stork was sitting near by.

The latter smiled and observed gently, "My friend, I found you lying alone and unprotected. The sun was scorching your body. I could not bear to see a fellow creature suffer, so I spread my wings over your body. Now that you are awake, I shall go back to my place."

The hunter looked at the bird and said,

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"Oh, kind protector! I am very much obliged to you for your kindness. What, however, saddens me is the fact that a bird has thought fit to protect me, while my village folks will have nothing to do with me. Alas! Alas!" And he heaved a sigh.

"That is strange language! May I know why they avoid you?"

"Yes, I may find some relief if I unburden my feelings to you."

"If I can help you in any way, I shall be glad."

"How good you are! Nobody before has ever spoken kindly to me. I am the most downtrodden creature that the world has ever seen."

"You are exaggerating your case, friend. Millions are living under far worse circumstances."

"How do you, a bird, know about us, men?"

"I know something, for I can understand human language."

"So I see. But let me tell you that I am an outcaste."

"Why?"

"Because I am a hunter."

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"Ah! Your profession is ignoble. Why do you not become a farmer? You will then be an honored man in your village."

"It is too late now, my friend. No one will help me."

"But did you ever try to turn over a new leaf?"

"I confess not."

"Then go home and try to earn an honest living."

"But my stomach craves for food. How am I to support myself for the next few months, supposing I follow your advice?"

"Beg."

"No one will give anything to a healthy man like myself."

"Go to another village and secure a job."

"We hunters never do menial work."

"That is foolish pride."

"But I am hungry. I have not tasted any food since yesterday. I have not been able to secure a single bird. What shall I do?"

"I will procure some fruits for you immediately."

"Thank you for your kind offer. But

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after that on what shall I live?"

"Why, on fruits; you can have any quantity of them here, free."

"No, no, I am not a fruitarian."

"What do you want?"

"To kill some birds, so that I may sell them."

"Oh! cruel man, give up your blood-thirsty ways."

"No, I will not. I shall not—cannot—take to another calling instantly. I must find some game. You are in my favour and may fetch me a handsome sum. I will kill you." And without another word, the hunter took up his bow and arrow and shot the bird.

While it lay struggling, it cried out in its pain, "Oh! ungrateful man! I do not grieve for my death, for I was destined to die at your hands. But is this my reward for saving your life? I did you good and you have repaid me with evil. I shall not live long. But I shall not curse you or wish you ill. At this time, I sincerely pray to the Giver of all good to turn your mind to another channel. Learn to be honest, grateful, and sincere. Then however low your calling may be, you

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will be respected. I know now why you are despised. I pray to God for your welfare." The bird gave a gasp and died.

The hunter listened to the words of the bird in amazement and was seized with remorse. He plucked the arrow out of its body, but it was too late. The stork was dead.

Suddenly he laughed aloud, threw away his bow and arrows, and ran on. Where he went, what became of him, nobody in the village knew or cared to enquire.

"A nuisance has been got rid of," remarked the village headman to a group of acquaintances, isn't it so, friends?"

They entirely agreed with him. But in a village far away the man whom they had once despised lived a humble but happy life as a farmer. When men as they passed him saluted instead of shunning him, he thought with thankfulness of the poor stork. Its dying words had given him strength to begin a new life.

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THE STORY OF DHRUVA

In days of yore there lived a powerful King, named Uttanpada. He had two queens, Suniti and Suruchi.

These queens were of opposite temperaments. Suniti was gentle, kind and loving, while Suruchi was violent, wilful, quarrelsome, and mean.

But for some reason, the King loved Suruchi, who poisoned his ears against Suniti whenever she found an opportunity of doing so. Matters at last came to a head when the King, at the instigation of Suruchi, banished Suniti from his Kingdom.

Suniti did not mourn or complain. She walked out of the palace wearing a simple piece of cloth without any ornament except the wedding token.

She walked slowly on and by and by, came to a forest, where many hermits lived. One of them very kindly gave her shelter.

Soon after she gave birth to a son, whom she named Dhruva.

Dhruva lived with the hermit boys, and was under the impression that he was the son

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of a hermit. But when he was about five years of age, he learned that a King was his father. This made him anxious to see him.

One day, without telling anybody of his intention, he stole out of the hermitage and went to the palace.

When he went in he found his father holding his step-mother's son on his lap. Seeing him his father asked, "Who are you?"

"I am your son, Dhruva."

"My son? I have no son except this child on my lap."

"If you do not believe me, you may ask my mother and the sage who has brought me up."

Uttanpada now believed that Dhruva was his son. He was about to take him in his lap, but Suruchi would not allow him to do so. She brushed the child aside and told him, "You are asking for the moon. You have no right to be here. Your mother has been banished by your father. She is dead to us. My son will ascend the throne, not you."

These words struck Dhruva to the heart. He looked to his father, but he turned away and began to fondle Suruchi's son. At this

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tears rolled down Dhruva's cheeks, and he walked out of the palace with hanging head. Dhruva returned to the hermitage weeping. "What ails thee, son?" his mother questioned him anxiously. "Are you ill? Has anybody beaten you?"

"No mother," Dhruva replied. Then he told her his story. She listened calmly and when he finished said, "Your step-mother is right, you have no longer any place in your father's household. You are dead to him. But do not be troubled. If you learn to follow the ways of the sages here, you will become great and a power in the land."

"Mother," said Dhruva, "I have now shaken off the pain that was troubling me. I feel better in mind and spirit. Bless me. By your blessing, I shall overcome all difficulties and troubles," and he took the dust of his mother's feet.

One night, Dhruva stole away and walked on until he came to where several hermits sat in deep meditation. He sat down, watching their movements.

When they had finished their prayers, they opened their eyes and saw Dhruva, whom

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they questioned gently, "Child, what do you want? You seem to be unhappy."

Dhruva told them who he was and added, "Oh sages! I want you to show me the path to the Divine Presence."

"Pray to God earnestly and your desire will be gratified."

"I am a child. I do not know how to pray to him. Teach me how I can find him."

"Pray to him earnestly and whole-heartedly. Address him thus: 'O, Thou All-knower, I pray Thee, show favour unto me.' This will be enough for a child like yourself. You have our blessings. May your desire be gratified."

Dhruva saluted the hermits, rose with a light heart, and went into a deep forest, where he began to pray. How earnest, how deep, how sincere were his prayers! He forgot his surroundings; he ate nothing, drank nothing—but the name of 'Hari' alone was on his lips.

At the earnestness of his prayers, even the gods became surprised. Indra thought Dhruva was bent on removing him from his throne. In the disguise of his mother, he came to him, one day, and addressed him thus:

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"Child, why did you go away without informing me? I have been searching for you everywhere. Now that I have found you, I will not let you go."

But Dhruva did not hear these words. The false Suniti's lamentations did not reach his ears; so intently was he engaged in his prayers.

The gods then sent many wild animals to frighten him, but even these failed to disturb him.

They then went in a body to Vishnu and said, "Father, a wonderful child is praying to Thee. We fear he wants to dethrone Indra or some other God. What is he really after?"

Vishnu smiled and replied, "I know well. You need not be afraid of him. He seeks no earthly reward, but something higher and nobler."

The gods went away satisfied. One day, Narada asked Vishnu, "Father, how is it that a mere child is seeking Thee so intently, but Thou art not moving at all? Why art Thou so cruel?"

Vishnu smiled. "His time is not come

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yet. Nothing happens before its time. Wait a while."

"But, father, I cannot understand how a child of five years has come to realise Thee. How is it that whilst thousands of hermits have been worshipping Thee for ages without finding Thee, a mere child is about to see Thee? Pray, solve this riddle."

Vishnu smiled and took him to a certain place. Narada was surprised to see hundreds of Dhruvas there!

"The mystery deepens, father," Narada remarked. "So many Dhruvas about? What's the meaning?"

"My son, there is no mystery about the matter. It takes years and years to reach the Godhead. Dhruva was born hundreds of times on earth, hence the hundreds of Dhruvas whom you see. Dhruva has so far progressed that, in this life, he will realise the craving of his heart."

"But why are you so tantalizing the child?"

"He has not been initiated yet. I charge Thee, go and initiate him without delay."

Narada descended to earth and went to the spot where Dhruva sat praying. He

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said to him, "Child, I have come."

Dhruva opened his eyes, and seeing an old man before him, observed: "You are not Hari, whom I seek. Hari is beautiful beyond description. He is not old. He has eyes like the lotus and he carries his disc always. But who are you, old man?"

Narada replied, "I have been sent by him to initiate you."

"Oh! Then make no delay. I am ready."

Narada took him to a stream near by, where he was bathed, and then he whispered the Vishnu *mantra* into his ears, which sent a thrill through his body.

Dhruva went back to his place and began to mutter the *mantra* which he had been taught. Vishnu could no longer hold back. He came down from his abode and stood before Dhruva, whom he addressed sweetly: "My son, I have come."

Dhruva opened his eyes and saw, for the first time, what his heart longed to see. His joy knew no bounds. He shed tears of joy and said, "Father, why were you so cruel to a child like myself? I am a sinner, that is why you did not respond earlier

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to my call. Father, leave me not."

"No child, I shall ever be by your side. What more do you want?"

"I pray that whenever I may feel inclined to see Thee in Thy True form, Thou wilt reveal Thyself to me."

"Thy wishes are granted."

Dhruva fell at his feet and began to chant hymns. When he rose, he saw that Hari was gone.

"Gone so soon, father?" Dhruva cried in pain. "You promised to appear to me when I called you. Come, Oh! Father, show your form to me once again."

Hari responded to his call. He always responds to the call of his *bhaktas*.

"Child, what do you want?" He asked sweetly.

"Father, why dids't Thou leave me so soon? With what difficulty I found Thee, Thou knowest. Why then did'st Thou go away so soon?"

"I have promised to appear to you whenever you wish me to."

Dhruva bowed low. Hari blessed him and went away.

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Dhruva then went to the hermitage of the sage where his mother lived. She supposed that he was dead. She had cried so much for him that she had become blind.

When Dhruva reached the hermitage, news of his return was conveyed to his mother by the son of a hermit. She ran to welcome him. How she fondled him, how she stroked his hair, and kissed him again and again!

Dhruva suffered her to caress him to her heart's content. Then seizing an opportunity, he disclosed his secret.

Suniti was delighted beyond measure.

"What?" she cried. "Thou hast seen Hari so soon, to see whom sages spend millions of years in prayers and meditation? How fortunate am I in possessing a son like you! Not only I am blessed, but the family in which you were born is also blessed. My joy is complete. I want nothing more. I have only one request to make. Cannot you ask Hari to show his form to me once?"

"Why not?" Dhruva cried, and he prayed to him to show Himself in his True form.

Hari came readily.

Dhruva bowed and said, "Father, Thou art

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pleased with me, but I pray Thee to show Thyself to my mother also. She longs to see Thee."

"This is not possible, my child. She has not acquired merit enough for the purpose. But tell her she will ever be happy, and in the fulness of time will find me. What do you want yourself?"

"Father, I am a King's son, as you know. My father's throne rightly belongs to me. But I do not wish to enjoy earthly pleasures. I wish to be at a place that is far superior to anything on earth."

"I shall fulfil your desire, child. Your place will be above that of the sun, the moon and stars, you will have a separate 'Loka' (abode) in my domain. You will become a fixed star in the heavens and your mother also will be made a star and find a place close to you. Your name will go down from generation to generation as a *bhakta* of the truest type, so that people may imitate your example and learn to live a holy life."

Dhruva fell at Hari's feet and began chanting hymns.

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IN SEARCH OF ROMANCE

Once there lived a King named Laksman who had a son, Sumana by name. The prime minister of the King had a son named Lompad, who was of the same age as Sumana. The two boys grew up together and became fast friends.

When grown, they decided to go abroad to see the world. They knew that if they told their parents what they had in mind, they would refuse to let them go alone. So they ran away.

They wore simple clothes so that their position in life might not be discovered. They carried little money for fear it should be stolen. They lived on the simplest food. Whenever they were questioned, they said that they were looking for work.

Their money was soon exhausted. When starvation stared them in the face, they had to seek work. They were offered menial labour, which at first they refused to accept. But necessity knows no law, and when they felt the pinch of hunger, they yielded. Sumana was engaged by a money-lender to

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water his garden, feed his cows, and run errands. Lompad became a bazar coolie.

Sumana's employer lived a lonely life. Sumana found that he was not only cruel but harsh and overbearing. He put up with the insult and abuse which his employer heaped upon him. He consoled himself with the thought that his new life would teach him how to sympathize with his less fortunate fellow-beings.

One day, Sumana's employer said, "I am expecting a visit from one of my debtors. He is a bad man, and I fear he may do me harm. When he comes, arm yourself with a thick stick and remain hidden behind the screen there. If I need your services, run to my assistance."

Sumana promised to defend him.

The debtor, whose name was Harsha, turned up at the appointed time. He was very powerfully built and seemed to Sumana a dangerous man.

The money-lender received him affably and asked, "Have you brought my money, my friend?"

"Yes, but only the principal."

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"What about the interest?"

"Ha! Ha!" laughed Harsha. "Consider yourself lucky if you get your principal back."

"I must have my interest, too."

"How much does that amount to?"

"Two hundred and fifty pieces of silver."

"Two hundred and fifty lashes on your back will repay my debt," and the fellow attacked the money-lender immediately.

The latter stepped nimbly to one side and made a signal, whereupon Sumana came out of his hiding place and fell on the assailant. Harsha defended himself as best as he could and laid about him freely. But Sumana soon overpowered him. He searched his person and found a dagger, which he snatched away. Sumana then demanded payment at once of his debt. Harsha, however, pleaded poverty and begged for time.

"It is all very well," Sumana sneered, "To ask for time so that you may run away and refuse to meet my employer's dues. You must pay up at once, otherwise you will go to prison."

Harsha was cowed by Sumana's boldness and said, "I will pay up in full, but your employer

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will have to reduce his rate of interest."

"How much is it?"

"One hundred and twenty per cent."

"Oh! How much can you afford to pay?"

"Twelve per cent at the most."

Sumana turned to his employer and begged him to reduce his interest.

"No, indeed," cried the money-lender. "That fellow knew my terms. Why did he agree to them?"

"I was forced to accept them," said Harsha. "But I did not think you would hold me to them."

"You must pay me in full."

Sumana said, "He will, but with twelve per cent interest."

"Go away, you ungrateful creature," his employer shouted. "Is this how you serve your master?"

"Have I sold myself to you?"

"Practically."

"Oh! What daring! Do you know who I am?" Sumana checked himself in time.

"You are the King of this place," the money-lender sneered. "Hail, King! I salute thee!"

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Sumana did not mind the insult, but looked at his employer calmly and said, "If you do not accept what this poor man offers you, you will not get anything at all."

The debtor looked at him gratefully and said, "I will reward you for this some day."

The money-lender reflected for a moment and agreed to accept interest at twelve per cent.

Harsha paid up in full immediately, and when leaving, gave his address to Sumana, begging him to come and see him.

When the man left, the money-lender abused Sumana and ordered him to leave his house at once.

Sumana replied, "You are ungrateful. If I had not been here, you would have been robbed and killed. I do not care to be in your service any longer. You may keep the wages due to me as a gift from me."

Soon after leaving his employer, he met Lompad and told him what had happened.

Lompad asked, "How do you propose to support yourself now?"

"What is written in my fate will happen."

"But do not depend upon fate alone. Have you forgotten what Vishnusarma has

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taught us in his 'Hitopadesa?' The goddess of wealth favours the man who perseveres. Only cowards depend upon fate."

"Yes, I have not forgotten his teaching, but nevertheless, I believe in fate."

"Well, I believe in self-help. Let us see which of us will prove to be right."

Sumana decided to visit his new friend Harsha. The latter received him cordially and asked, "Who are you really, sir? May I know?"

"Pray do not be inquisitive. I have chosen my career."

"What is it?"

"Vagabondage."

"That is mock-heroism, not business."

Sumana agreed with him and said, "I have left my employer for good and must find a new master."

"Why should you not be your own master?"

"What do you mean?"

"I know a merchant who is looking for a working partner. He wants an honest man to help him in his business. I would like to introduce you to him. What do you say?"

"I shall be glad to see your friend

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and discuss his offer."

Sumana was taken to the merchant, who carried on an extensive business in silk. He had a son, but he did not trust him, as he was a spendthrift and had run through a fortune which he had inherited from his father-in-law. The merchant would not admit him as a partner and was looking for a trustworthy person.

After a long talk with Sumana, the merchant agreed to take him into partnership. With his help, the business made rapid strides. At Sumana's suggestion, the merchant began dealing in timber, in which he was also successful.

Days wore on. Sumana had one success after another, to the envy of not a few fellow-merchants.

But one morning, he heard that his partner had been murdered the night before, and his son had been arrested on suspicion of being his father's murderer.

This was not all. Several creditors of the merchant appeared on the scene, forcibly took possession of his business and turned out Sumana. The latter thought at first that he

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would appeal to the King for justice, but decided not to do so, as he would then have to disclose his identity.

Sumana had invested all his savings in the several businesses of his partner; and as these were now in other's hands, he had no money left to call his own. He was poor again.

Lompad heard what had happened to Sumana and came to see him.

"What do you propose to do now?" Lompad asked.

"Try again."

"But you have no body to back you."

"What is in my fate will happen."

"Fate! Fate!! Don't talk of fate. But why have you not cared to enquire what I am doing at present?"

"Oh! Excuse me for my thoughtlessness. Tell me how you are getting along."

"I am in business."

"What line?"

"Wool."

"In partnership?

"No, I am sole proprietor."

"Where did you get your capital?"

"I borrowed money from my employer."

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"And set up in business for yourself?"

"Yes. I am making money. I have paid up my creditors in full already. If you wish, you may join me."

"No. You forgot our original resolve was to see the world. Instead, here we are busy earning money, though we have no need to."

"Isn't this adventure enough? A new life lies open before us."

"Perhaps; I had not thought of it in that light."

Sumana decided to see Harsha again. He went and was cordially received, and asked what he wanted. Sumana replied: "Do you know anybody who will admit me as a working partner?"

"Do you know what has happened to your money-lender employer?" Harsha questioned him.

"No."

"He has been robbed of all his money."

"I am not interested in him any longer."

"Let me finish, please. He has complained to the King against you."

"Me? Why?"

"I was at the court, yesterday, when I saw

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the money-lender and heard him petitioning the prime minister."

"What did the minister say?"

"He told him that he knew you to be of a reliable character, and so he would not entertain the fellow's charge against you."

"Ah! That is news indeed! But who has robbed him, I wonder. Considering his antecedents, he deserves to lose all his money."

"That's my opinion, too."

"I will help the money-lender to discover who has robbed him."

"Why poke your nose into another's affairs?"

"I owe him a debt."

"You don't. You were paid for your services."

"What shall I do now? I am penniless once more."

"If you don't mind, I am prepared to lend you money."

"That's curious. Where did you get it?"

"I earned it."

Sumana rose suddenly, caught hold of the man's throat, and cried out: "You are the one who robbed the money-lender."

Harsha struggled to release himself, but

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Sumana held him fast as in a vice.

"Confess," Sumana roared.

"I will tell you everything," Harsha squeaked. "Pray, release me."

"Ah! Just what I suspected. Let me have the whole amount of your misgotten wealth at once. If you don't, I will have you brought before the King."

The man quailed. When he was released, he went into his inner apartments and brought out a bagful of money, which he handed over to Sumana. The latter went to the money-lender, told him how he had discovered the thief, and handed him the bag of money.

The money-lender eagerly counted his money and found it was intact.

"It is all right," he said presently. "But how can I repay my debt to you?"

"By promising not to charge a heavy rate of interest."

"Suppose I give up my money-lending business."

"How will you earn a living?"

"I have already thought of that. I intend starting a business."

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"It is a good idea."

"Of which you will be a half partner."

"You are not serious, are you?"

"I was never more serious in my life."

"I shall be glad to help you."

The money-lender handed him the bag of money and said, "Here is your capital. Start any business you like. I have now learnt to appreciate your worth. I know you will do your best for me."

"Thank you, sir, for trusting me, a stranger, in this way."

"But I have not yet done. I am a lonely man. I am old and do not know how long I shall live. I propose to make you my heir on my death."

"This is more than I expected."

"I have not done yet. Please come to my house to-day and make it your home."

Sumana was overwhelmed.

"I must make a confession, sir," he said. "I must tell you who I am."

"I do not care to know."

"But you must know."

"Well, go on, my friend."

"I am not what you suppose. I am the

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son of a King." And Sumana told him how he and Lompad had set forth on their travels that ended in business undertakings.

The money-lender heard his story to the end. Then he remarked, "I suspected that you were not what you professed to be. However, since you will some day be rich yourself, you do not need my money. But I have decided to leave my all to you, whatever your position in life may be. You must not refuse my gift. I have more money hidden away. I have also landed properties worth a considerable amount. You will have all this immediately."

"And what will you do?"

"I would like to retire to Benares and pass the last years of my life in contemplation. I need no money. I shall live on charity."

"With all this wealth? No, that cannot be. Your idea is a worthy one, and I shall not oppose your wishes. But you must carry with you sufficient money to keep you in comfort for the rest of your life. If you ever need money, send me word and I will forward it to you at once."

The money-lender rose, embraced Sumana,

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and said fervently, "It was a fortunate day that brought you here—fortunate for me, and I hope, fortunate for you also."

When Lompad again visited Sumana, he congratulated him upon having come into possession of so much wealth.

"It is all due to fate," said Sumana, as usual.

"I am not so sure of that," said Lompad. "Tell me, please, how you discovered that Harsha was the thief."

"He seemed suspiciously agitated when I said that I was going to help the money-lender to discover who had robbed him."

"There you are!" answered Lompad triumphantly. "It was your ability to read character that gave you one advantage, and your trustworthiness that gave you another. Fate had very little to do with it."

"Have it your own way," smiled Sumana. "But tell me one thing. Are you satisfied to let our search for romance end like this?"

"Why not?" answered his companion. "At least we have found something to do more interesting and worth while than idling away our days in the palace."

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"And what is more, I have learned to sympathize with and respect the man who has to struggle for existence."

"Yes, life is a good teacher if we give her a chance," was Lompad's conclusion.

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BE NOT HASTY

Sankaram, a learned man, would not accept any dole or present without rendering a service in return. His wife did not like this practice and frequently quarrelled with him on account of it.

One day a merchant sent several presents to the pundit, who, as usual, refused to accept them. At this, his wife became very angry and said, "You are poor and have not been able to lay by anything for a rainy day. We have often only one meal a day and even that is seldom full. You are a fool to return these presents."

The pundit smiled and observed, "You know my rule of never accepting anything without doing something in return. The merchant who has sent me these presents is a stranger to me. There must be some reason for these rich presents. He must have some ulterior motive."

"You talk like a child. What benefit would a wealthy merchant reap from a poor man like yourself?"

"Do not forget my calling. He may have committed some social wrong. A Brahman

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alone can 'cure his defect,' as we say. Did you notice the presents were not merely in kind, but were accompanied by a heavy purse? What was the reason for the merchant's sending me a purse? He must be in trouble. Just you wait. You will see that my surmise is correct."

His wife grumbled, but waited.

Two or three days later the merchant turned up with still richer presents which he laid at the pundit's feet.

Sankaram told him, "I cannot accept these gifts, valuable as they are. I have not rendered you any service so far."

"Sir," the merchant observed with folded hands, "you will have to render me a service now. These gifts are meant as reward for service."

"What can I do for you?"

"The fact is — er —"

"Go on, sir. Tell me everything without reserve. Otherwise, how can I advise you?"

"Yes, I must be perfectly frank. But, sir, do not disclose my secret to anybody."

"No, I never betray a confidence. You may speak freely."

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"Sir, I married my daughter to a boy who, I thought, was of my caste. But I have just discovered, to my dismay, that he is of the washerman caste. You know what this means to me. If the fact gets out, I shall be undone. What am I to do?"

Sankaram reflected for a moment and said, "Before marrying your daughter, did you make careful enquiries about the boy's caste?"

"Yes, I did."

"Good. Who has told you that the boy is a washerman?"

"A friend of mine."

"Friend, you say. How long have you known him?"

"About ten years."

"Has he ever rendered you any service?"

"Not in the strict sense of the word."

"But he has received many favours from you, has he not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did he attend your daughter's wedding?"

"Oh! Yes."

"Did he attend the marriage feast?"

"Yes, with all the members of his family."

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"Oh! And now he has discovered that your son-in-law is a washerman! Take my word for it, there is something tricky about this."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Have enquiries made by a trustworthy man about your son-in-law's caste and also as to why your friend has tried to poison your ears against him."

"Why should he try to poison my ears?"

"Please do not argue with me. Your friend has some motive for his action."

"You surprise me."

"Can you read Sanskrit?"

"A little."

"Do you see the motto on the wall there?"

The merchant read, '*Sahasa vidadhita nakriyam.*' (Do not act hastily.)

"Take my advice. Never act hastily. If you do, you are sure to land in difficulties."

"Sir, I know no man whom I can trust implicitly. Would you act for me? You say you do not accept any free gift. These presents are meant as fees for your service. Accept them in that light. If you can satisfy me that my friend has lied, I shall reward you handsomely."

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"Very well, I will undertake the business for you. But you will have to work with me so that you may know what action I mean to take."

The merchant agreed.

That very day, the pundit went to the house of the merchant's son-in-law's father, Gopalam by name, and, after a few preliminary remarks, observed, "You seem to be ill at ease. What troubles you?"

Gopalam said, "Punditji, do you know astrology?"

"I do."

"Would you make a calculation for me?"

"Yes, with pleasure."

"I am in trouble. My son's father-in-law has a friend who has set abroad a rumour that I am a washerman. The result is that I am being shunned by all my friends."

"Why is he blackening your name?"

"He owes me money. It is a considerable amount. The other day, I asked him to pay what he owed, but he pleaded poverty, though I know he is well-to-do. When I pressed him for my dues, he started blackening my family's name."

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"Ah! So the matter lies that way. I am not surprised. Do not be alarmed, however. I will smooth matters for you."

"If you can, I shall reward you handsomely."

The pundit told the merchant what he had learned which greatly surprised him. The merchant then took the pundit to his friend. There Sankaram was introduced as an astrologer. The friend begged him to foretell his future.

The pundit examined his palms, made certain calculations, and said, "I see you are in trouble."

"That is true."

"You are to blame for your trouble."

"How is that?"

"I find you have incurred somebody's displeasure. Tell me everything frankly, so that I may advise you."

The friend reflected for a moment and said, "I owe money to a certain man. He has been pressing me for his dues. I am unable to repay my debt, at present. I do not think I shall be able to pay it within a year. But he will not give me time."

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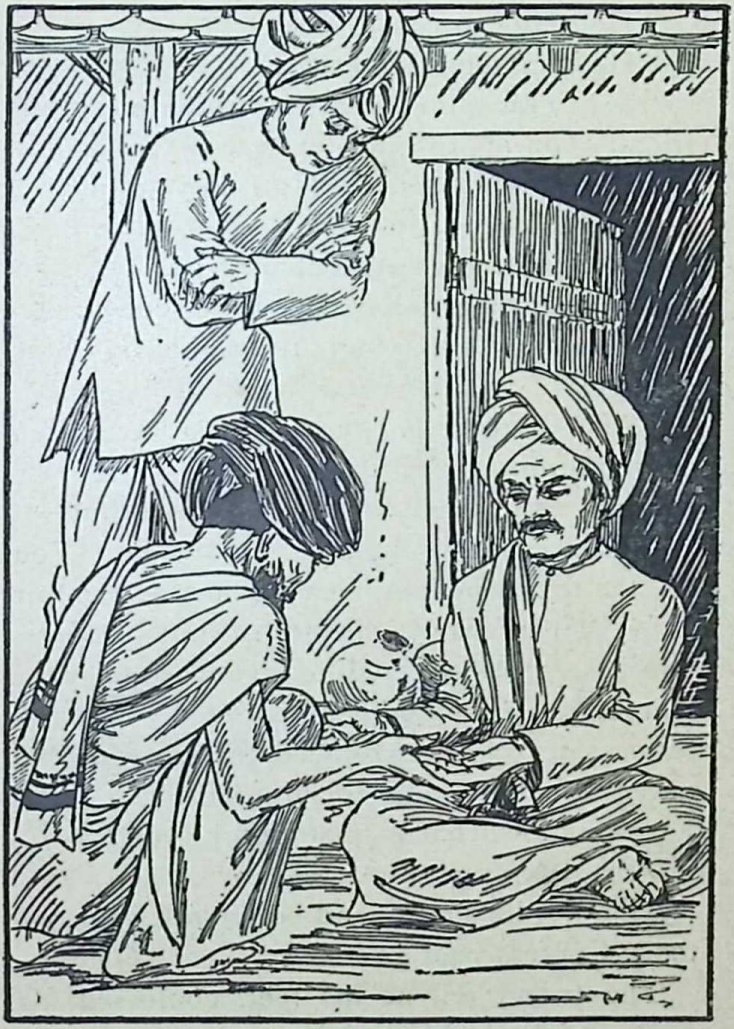

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"He may sue you."

"He threatens to do that."

"Is he Gopalam the father of your merchant friend's son-in-law?"

The friend started. "How do you know?" he asked sharply.

The pundit gave a peculiar smile.

"We astrologers have our little secrets."

"I see. Well, you are right in your surmise."

"And to revenge yourself, you have been calling him a washerman."

"Not—I—sir—I assure you—not—but—"

Sankaram said roughly, "Do not lie. You are the man who has been blackening the fair name of his family. To serve your interests, you have not hesitated to give pain to your merchant friend who has rendered you many services in your times of need, though you have never done anything for him all these years. Do you know what is in store for you?"

"Sir, I am not, I — I —"

"Do not lie again, and before a Brahman, too. Confess your guilt."

The friend fell at his feet, confessed his guilt, and begged for advice.

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"Well," the pundit said, "now that you have made a clean breast of everything, I shall try to save your honour. But you must first see that the mischief done by you is undone."

"What should I do, sir?"

The pundit told him how he should proceed in the matter. The result was that, within a short time, the tarnish on Gopalam's family was removed. In gratitude, Gopalam gave numerous presents to the pundit. The merchant was also highly delighted and expressed his gratitude by making lavish presents to Sankaram. His friend, too, made him some presents.

The pundit got enough to keep him in comfort for a long time. He addressed his wife thus, one day: "My love, do you see the use of my motto which hangs on the wall there? If I had not taken time to reflect and to probe the motives of that merchant's friend, I would not have been able to help the merchant out of his difficulties. By so doing I have earned these gifts of his, and that is better than accepting them without compensation."

His wife agreed with him, saying, "Yes, it is better, I admit." Then she bowed low and took the dust of his feet reverentially.

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A DUTIFUL BROTHER

I have already told my readers that many renowned Kings and warriors who left their mark in the history of Aryavarta were born in the solar dynasty.

Dasaratha was born of the solar race, and at an early age won considerable fame. He had a special qualification that marked him out as a fighter of the first rank. He was a 'Sabdabedi,' that is, he could shoot an invisible animal by the mere sound of its movements.

He had three wives, namely Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. Ram was the son of Kausalya, Bharat of Kaikeyi and Laksman and Satrughna of Sumitra.

When Ram came of age, Dasaratha decided to instal him as King of Ayodhya. Ram had all the accomplishments, and excelled in the use of arms. He was married with great pomp and ceremony to Sita, daughter of King Janaka of Mithila.

Extraordinary preparations for the installation of Ram were made. Invitations were sent far and wide. Feastings and amusements

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were the order of the day, when suddenly a bolt fell from the blue.

It so happened that, on one occasion, Kaikeyi had rendered an important service to her husband, who had promised to grant her any boon she sought. She had told him that she did not ask any boon then, but would do so when she needed it.

Kaikeyi had a very wicked maid-servant, named Manthara. She was hump-backed, greedy, and rude. She induced her mistress to seize the opportunity of asking Dasaratha to place Bharat, her son, on the throne of Ayodhya, and banish Ram. Kaikeyi, at first, refused to seek these boons from her husband; but her ears were so much poisoned by the wicked Manthara that she decided to act according to her suggestion, although knowing full well that, by so doing, she would be incurring blame.

Seizing an opportunity, she spoke to Dasaratha thus: "Do you remember that you once promised to grant me two boons?"

"Yes," the King replied.

"I now ask you to fulfil your promise."

"I will. What do you want?"

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"I hesitate to speak my mind, for I am sure you will not care to fulfil my desires."

"When I have given you my word, I will keep it regardless of consequences."

"If that be so, I will speak out freely. The first boon that I seek is this—that you banish Ram for fourteen years; the second boon is that my son, Bharat, should be installed King."

Dasaratha was aghast. "Are you mad?" he asked in vexation. "What demon has possessed you? Ask me some other boons and I will gladly grant them."

"I want no other boons."

Dasaratha prayed and protested, but to no avail. He returned with a heavy heart and spoke about Kaikeyi's request to Ram. The latter was not in the least ruffled.

He said, "Why should you worry yourself on my account, father? I am ready to fulfil my mother's request without any hesitation. Her word is law unto me. I will carry out her bidding."

The news soon spread and everybody was stunned by it. Festivities were stopped and the place was filled with gloom and sadness.

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Everybody spoke ill of Kaikeyi and also of Dasaratha. When Sita heard the news, she decided to follow her lord into banishment. Laksman too resolved to accompany his brother in his exile.

When the King heard of their resolve, his sorrow knew no bounds. He took to his bed, from which he never again rose.

Ram, Sita, and Laksman discarded their princely garments, put on simple dress and started for the forest. The inhabitants of Ayodhya wished to follow them, and with great difficulty were persuaded to go back.

They walked on slowly, living on fruits and roots which they could procure on the way.

Bharat did not know what mischief his mother had done. She sent a message to her son, who was with his uncle at Nandigram, asking him to come back at once, but giving no reason.

Meantime, Dasaratha had become so overwhelmed with sorrow that he died of a broken heart on the sixth day after Ram's departure. When Bharat came, he heard all that had happened and was deeply grieved. He rebuked his mother severely for the mischief sh

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had done, and decided to find Ram and seat him on the throne.

The ministers told him, "As Ram has gone away to fulfil your father's behest and Laksman has gone with him, you are the rightful successor to the throne. So pray ascend it and rule the kingdom."

Bharat said, "When an elder brother is living, it is improper for a younger brother to usurp his throne. Rather, I will go to the forest for fourteen years in my brother's stead."

"Well said," the ministers cried in the exuberance of their feelings. "Just what a scion of the solar dynasty is expected to say," and they began to praise him.

Bharat said modestly that what he had decided to do was nothing extraordinary. Accompanied by his ministers and others, he left Ayodhya to bring Ram back.

After considerable search, Bharat found his brother near the Chitrakut Hills. He fell at his feet and began to weep. Ram lifted him gently and enquired about his father, and the welfare of his subjects. Bharat told him what had happened during the last few days. On

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hearing of his father's death, Ram gave way to lamentations. At the suggestion of the sage Vasista, he went to the bank of the Falgu river and performed his father's *sradh*.

Then Bharat begged him repeatedly to return to Ayodhya and ascend the throne, adding, "Brother, I beg you to give up your present life and return home. I, your younger brother, cannot rule while you are alive. I am a boy. What do I know of government? If you do not come back, I shall give up this life. My mother has committed a sin which you alone can help to expiate."

Ram told him gently, "Brother, do not speak in that way. If I return, our father will have committed a sin and may have to go to hell. I must fulfil his promise. If I do not do so, I shall be failing in my duty towards him. The good name of our race will suffer. Go back, brother, and rule your subjects, wisely."

Bharat said, "If you will not listen to my prayer, I will accompany you in your wanderings. I do not care to go home."

Ram replied, "I am pleased to hear your words. You have spoken in a language quite

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befitting the son of Dasaratha. But remember one thing. Your mother has secured a boon from our father. To keep faith, I have cheerfully gone into banishment for fourteen years. Father has placed you on the throne. If you do not ascend it, you will be disobeying his injunction. You must, therefore, go home and ascend the throne. Come what may, I will not fail to keep our father's promise."

Bharat said, "As you are resolved not to return home, I beg you to let me have your sandals."

"Why?"

"I shall place them on the throne and rule as a regent."

Ram shed tears of joy and removed his sandals, which Bharat put on his head reverentially.

Bharat then took the dust of his brother's feet and said, "Brother, during these fourteen years, I will not shave or cut my hair. I will live on fruits and roots and wait in expectation of your return. If you do not appear on the first day of the fifteenth year, I will throw myself into a fire and commit suicide."

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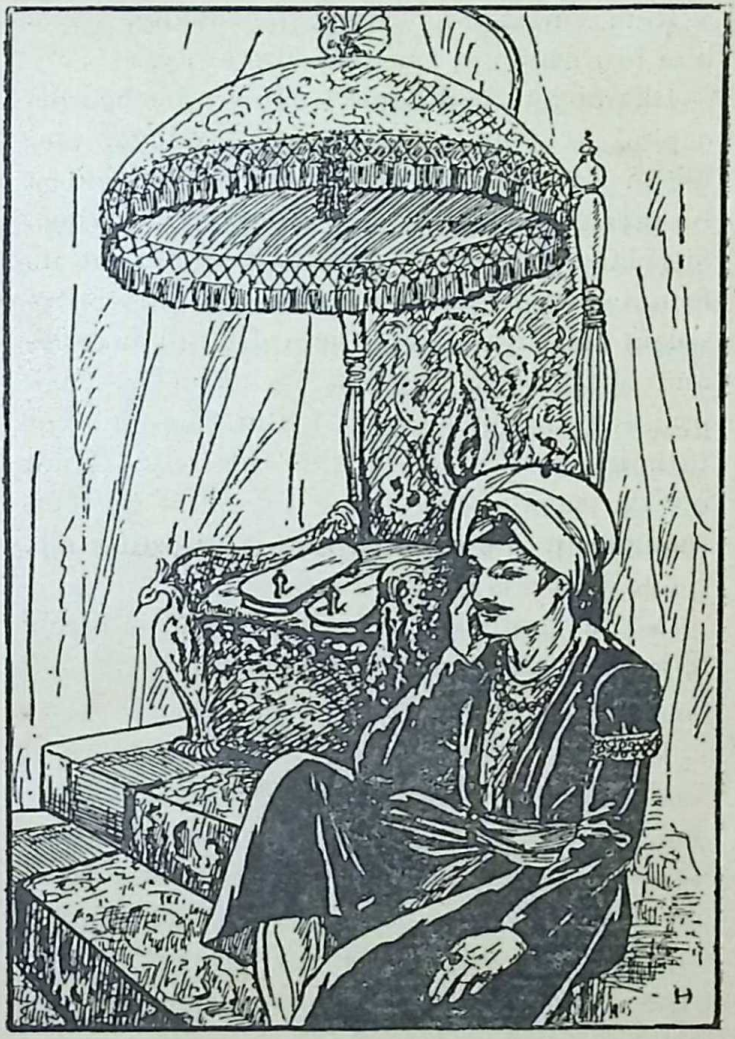

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Ram embraced Bharat repeatedly, gave him his blessings, and sent him away.

Bharat returned home. He established his capital at Nandigram, near Ayodhya, and began to rule as instructed by his eldest brother. He would not sit on the throne. He placed Ram's sandals on it and sat at its feet dispensing justice. His rule was benevolent and wise. He discarded all luxuries and lived a very simple life. He won high praise from his subjects. But this did not turn his head. He would often say, "I am not the ruler of the land; my eldest brother, though not present in body, is directing me. So all praise is his due, not mine."

A true brother, the like of whom is rarely to be met with in the world!

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MISUNDERSTOOD

Once Mahisoor (Mysore) was ruled over by a King, Ram Varma by name. He was not a bad ruler, but he had two great defects of character, which led him into trouble at times. First, he was thin-eared; secondly he easily succumbed to flattery. No wonder that clever people who could play their cards well, made money out of him without much trouble.

Chandrachura was the only son of the King. He attended Court regularly and, when asked, would give his decision in matters of State. This pleased the ministers, as his advice was generally very sound.

The prince saw that wicked men were cheating his father and making money by it. At first he kept quiet lest his father should get annoyed if he interfered.

But matters came to a head one day when a foreign jeweller named Nilakantha, appeared at the Court. After making valuable presents to the King, he began praising him. Among his gifts was a valuable diamond, which the jeweller said was worth a considerable amount.

Now, the prince was a connoisseur of

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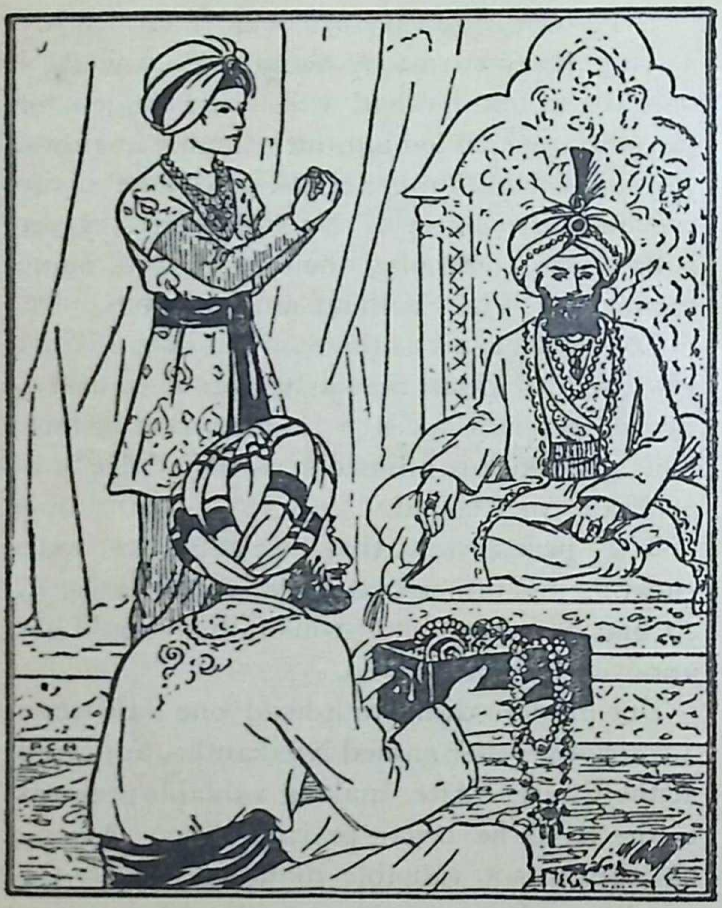
precious stones. He examined the diamond, shook his head and questioned the jeweller.



"How much is this stone worth, Sethji?"
"A lakh of pieces of silver."

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"I see. But are you sure it is worth so much?"

"If you do not believe me, send for the court jeweller and question him."

"We have no court jeweller; but I have handled many stones in my life and know a bit about them."

"You, a boy? That's strange. I am over sixty and have been in the jewellery business for the last forty years. Yet I make mistakes at times, even now."

"It is just possible you have made a mistake in the present case."

"No, not in this instance, at any rate."

The King interfered. "Well, you are a child," he said. "Do not try to annoy a man of his experience by your foolish arguments."

The prince said, "Sire, I am a child, no doubt; but I am not—"

The jeweller interrupted, "Sire, you have purchased millions of jewels, and undoubtedly know what is what. Would you examine the diamond for yourself?"

"Ah! it is all right. Do not be ruffled by my son's foolish words. What have you to offer me?"

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The jeweller displayed a stock of sparkling diamonds, which he priced at a million pieces of coin. Their sight so pleased the King that he ordered his treasurer to pay the price the jeweller asked. But the prince tried to prevent him.

"Sire," he observed with folded hands, "it is a lot of money. Should we not ask a disinterested person to examine the diamonds?"

"Am I poor?" the King thundered.

"It is not a question of poverty or wealth, father. We must not allow ourselves to be cheated."

"Do you insinuate that the jeweller is cheating me?"

"I do."

"What insolence! How dare you! Leave the palace at once."

"Your order will be obeyed, father. But I repeat, you are being cheated."

The jeweller laughed aloud and said, "Sire, you are the ruler of the world. Your wealth nobody can estimate. You have an immense army. Your name is known everywhere in the world and you are feared and respected by other rulers. Even the

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seas are afraid of you. You are mighty— "

The prince cried out, " Stop that flattery, you cheat. "

The King became very angry and ordered his prime minister to take his son to the nearest forest and leave him there.

The prince rose, and with a sigh, observed, " Father, your hastiness will be your undoing. You easily succumb to flattery, and are cheated right and left by clever knaves. I will leave the country, but I tell you you will repent of your action some day. "

Without another word, the prince strode out of the palace, wearing only a loin cloth.

The prime minister was much impressed by the words of the prince. Soon after the latter left, he sent secretly for a jeweller of his acquaintance, and asked him to examine the stones the King had purchased. But this man had heard about the trouble in the palace and, in fear of his life, he declared that the stones were all right. The prime minister was not, however, satisfied and resolved to have the stones tested by another jeweller some time later.

Not long after, a neighbouring King attacked Ram Varma's capital. The battle raged

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for several days and ended in the complete defeat of Ram Varma, who had to flee for his life. Nobody except his prime minister cared to accompany him. Those who had been loud in their protestations of loyalty to him, now went over to his rival. The King took shelter in a forest, where he lived on fruits and roots.

The prince had gone to a city about two hundred miles from his father's capital and secured a post in the house of a man who had great influence in the court of the King of the place.

One day, this King asked the courtier, "Can you tell me where the centre of the earth is?"

This was a poser, and the courtier was nonplussed. He pleaded his inability to answer the question. At this, the King became much annoyed and told him that if he did not give him a satisfactory answer within a week, his head would be cut off.

The courtier returned home in despair.

When the members of his family learned of his misfortune, they set up a loud cry.

The prince heard of his employer's trouble and said, "Sir, do not be disheartened. I shall answer your King's question to his satisfaction."

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"You! You!" the courtier seized his hands anxiously. "If you can do so, I will reward you very handsomely."

"Sir," the prince observed, "I seek no reward. But on one condition only shall I help you."

"What is that?"

"You will have to introduce me to the King."

"How can I do that?"

"Why not? Why should you not say I am your employer? Tell him I am a friend of yours."

"I cannot do that."

"Then suffer for your foolishness."

"That is insulting language."

"You have invited it."

"Who are you?"

"I am what I am."

The courtier looked at him keenly for a moment and said, "Do you think you will be able to give a satisfactory reply?"

"Oh! yes."

"Why not help me—?"

"No, no."

"I will turn you out."

"Very well. Then I will see the King

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myself, and, after your head is cut off, give him my answer."

"Do not be hard on me. I will pay you a thousand pieces of silver, if you tell me the answer."

"Not if you pay me a million."

"You seem to be not what you profess."

The prince smiled, but did not reply.

His employer questioned him, "What shall I do?"

"On the sixth day, take me to the King's presence. Introduce me as a—merchant's son. I will manage the rest."

Very reluctantly, the courtier took the prince to the court. The King asked the former, "Is your answer ready?"

"Yes, sire. It is so simple that I shall not answer it myself. This young friend of mine will answer it for me."

"Who is he?"

"A merchant's son, sire," the prince answered with a profound bow.

"Very well, let me have the answer quickly."

"Sire," the prince observed, "please let me have a mallet and a rod."

These were soon fetched and handed over

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to the prince. He drove the rod into the earth before the King's throne and, looking at him, said, "Sire, the centre of the earth is here."

"But how do you know?"

"If you do not believe me ask your men of science to test my statement."

The King felt that it was no easy matter to test the truth of the young man's statement. So to show that he was satisfied, he ordered his treasurer to pay a hundred thousand pieces of silver to the prince. The prince, however, declined to accept the gift and begged the King to distribute it amongst the poor and the needy.

At this the King was amazed and said, "I am sure you are a prince in disguise. Tell me who you are."

It so happened that Nilkantha, the jeweller who had cheated the prince's father, arrived at the court at this time. He recognised the prince at once, and cried out immediately, "You here?"

The King turned to the jeweller and asked, "Do you know this young man?"

"Yes, sire."

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"Who is he?"

"He is the son of King Ram Varma."

"Ah! I thought as much. None but a prince or King could have as much wisdom as this young man." Turning to the prince, he said, "Now that I have found out who you are, I appoint you my prime minister, and will marry you to my daughter."

The prince bowed.

The jeweller felt that when the prince had received so much favour at the King's hand, he had no hopes of selling his false stones at the court. He therefore tried to leave on some excuse. But the prince would not allow him to go.

He said, "My good friend, why are you leaving so abruptly? Why don't you display your stones before my King?"

"I am feeling unwell, sir," the jeweller answered. "I will come another day."

"Oh! If you sell only two stones, you will make enough to cure your illness."

At this sally, a laugh went round the court. The King insisted on the jeweller's displaying his stones. He reluctantly did so, feeling certain that flattery would not work this time.

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The prince found that most of the stones were faked. He chose a few for the King. The latter told him to buy the entire lot. But he said that those had defects and were not worth buying, so the jeweller made nothing this time.

The prince managed the affairs of State so well that the King became very fond of him. He not only married his daughter to him, but promised to make him his heir.

The King noticed that, at times, his son-in-law became very morose.

One day he said, "My son, what is the matter with you? You do not seem to be happy."

The prince replied, "Sire, I must tell you everything without reserve. I have heard that my father has lost his throne. I shall not feel at ease until I see him seated on it."

"Oh! Is that the only cause of your unhappiness?"

"Yes, sire."

"Very well. Take my army with you and drive out the usurper. Can you do that?"

"Why not, sire? With you to back me, I have no cause for anxiety or fear."

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"Then go. You have my blessing."

The prince set out at the head of an army, and, after a short battle, was able to capture and behead the King who had usurped his father's throne.

The subjects had been groaning under the harsh rule of their new King, and were delighted at the return of the prince.

He brought law and order into the kingdom where confusion had lately reigned.

He then sent out men to search for his father. Luckily, a woodman had seen King Ram Varma, and the prince brought him to the palace very soon.

The King was received with acclamation by his subjects. For days there was feasting and merry-making in the capital. Alms were freely distributed. Many measures to improve the lot of the subjects were introduced.

When affairs were normal again, the prince one day said to his father, "Sire, you know the cause of my banishment from your court."

"Oh! Don't refer to that matter. Let the dead past bury its dead."

"No, no, that cannot be. I wish to point out a fact that needs your attention."

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"Please bring the stones which you purchased from Nilkantha, and I will show you how he cheated you."

"Let by-gones be by-gones."

"I want to show that I did not play the fool or make a deliberately false statement. Please order the stones brought here."

These were in the treasury. The King ordered them to be brought to the court.

Selecting the stone for which the jeweller had asked a thousand pieces of silver, the prince passed it round amongst the courtiers.

Everybody said it was a genuine diamond.

"Now see what I will do with it," said the prince, and he crushed it with a pestle. Then he requested his father to taste the powdered stuff.

The King did so and exclaimed, "Why, this is sugar candy."

All the ministers tasted the powder and agreed with the King.

"You now see," the prince observed, "how you were cheated."

"Yes," the King said, crestfallen. "But how did you discover its real character?"

"I noticed that a fly was sitting on the

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stone all the while it was being displayed. If it were real, the fly would not have tarried on it long. Because it had something to eat, it stayed so long. I was convinced that the jeweller had moulded a piece of sugar candy in such a way that he could pass it off as a diamond on unsuspecting people. But he could not fool everybody."

"I see," the King said. "I admit I was hasty. I also admit that Nilkantha's flattery led me to believe him and disbelieve you. What's done cannot be undone. Should the rascal turn up again, I would teach him a sharp lesson."

"He will not turn up again; for he knows I have found out his trick and he is fully aware that his head is not safe here. But I owe him much. He has rendered me a service unknowingly. I have pardoned him."

"Do you mean to say that all the jewels he sold me were false?"

"Not all, but most of them." The prince proved his statement to the King's satisfaction.

The latter's eyes were now fully opened. He saw the error of his ways and declared, "Henceforth, I shall take care to see that

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flatterers have no place in my court. My son, I am grateful to you," and he took him in his arms and blessed him.

The prince bowed to him profoundly and took the dust of his feet.

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